

Friis, John

From: Tagan Engel [tagan@cityseed.org]
Sent: Saturday, March 14, 2009 9:34 PM
To: Friis, John
Subject: save ECA!!!!

Dear Representative Fleischmann, Senator Gaffey, and members of the Education Committee,

I am writing to strongly advocate for Sec.5 of House Bill H6666, which will allow for adjunct faculty certificates to be issued to the highly-trained professional artists, who serve as ECA's part-time faculty, to continue their 35-year record of preparing Connecticut's high-school students for our competitive global economy. If they are required to become certified for 10-hour per week part-time positions, they will not be able to do so and the school will close. This will be a terrible loss to Connecticut's high school students in 19 school districts.

I graduated from ECA in '91 from the dance department. I went to New Haven Public schools and ECA was an amazing highlight of my education. I have talked about it to people from other states and cities for years. Many of my friends also went to ECA and have gone on to become professional musicians, dancers, teachers actors etc. The community that was created by this unique school mixing kids from the city and the suburbs and emerging them in high quality arts education was unique, impressive and formative. At a time when New Haven was riddled by drugs and gang activity, ECA was a haven of sorts, and helped all of the students greatly as we applied to college and continued into adulthood. I have just moved back to New Haven after 15 years away, to raise my family, and ECA is a big part of why I feel that I want my children to attend New Haven public schools.

As a former teacher, I understand the need for proper teacher training and oversight, but ECA is a unique environment that deserves special attention. While being a professional artist doesn't qualify someone to teach outright, the types of professional artists that are drawn to work at ECA and are hired as teachers are people who understand high school students and have skills with working with them in addition to their skills as fine artists. Many of the people I grew up with and attended ECA with have now returned to New Haven and teach at ECA. If they had had to spend much of the past 15 years getting certified as a teacher in addition to their work in the arts, they would not be as good an artist, and certainly would not be motivated to take a 10 hour a week teaching job. ECA needs high quality Artists to teach, not teachers who have a little experience in the arts. That is not the same thing. ECA is a small school with plenty of support for the teachers and mentoring among staff, the quality of teaching has always been very high, and the quality of the content of the classes even higher.

Closing ECA would be an enormous mistake. Jeopardizing the quality of the teaching there would be almost worse because it would make the school a shadow of what it once was. It is an amazing place and has been for many years, and the teachers, as professional artists are what made it so. The proposed changes would be devastating. Please take some consideration and treat ECA with the care and unique attention it deserves.

Thank You
Tagan Engel

Tagan Engel
Policy Coordinator
CitySeed - New Haven, CT
www.cityseed.org